



Visionary Pianist Gerald Clayton Merges Streams of Life into a Greater Body of Work with *Tributary Tales*

Available April 21 on Motéma Music

Tributary: a stream that flows into a lake or river, feeding the greater body of water -- refreshing it, rejuvenating it.
Tributary Tale: a story whose message merges with a greater narrative of scattered origins and open ending.

On his new record ***Tributary Tales***, set to release **April 21 on Motéma Music**, pianist and composer **Gerald Clayton** traces paths of myriad streams -- personal, experiential, intangible -- that flow into one another, creating a musical narrative greater than the sum of his individual compositions.

"I feel like the various encounters in my life are in their own way tributaries -- like every trip is somehow an opportunity to discover a new type of bend in the river," Clayton says. "The various places, people, foods and cultures I've been able to experience in my travels, all the musicians I gathered for this project and all the songs I've written -- there's a feeling of connectedness between them, even though they're all their own separate entities."

Clayton imbues ***Tributary Tales*** with a range of influences, including dialects and vocabulary handed down from his father, bassist and composer John Clayton and uncle, saxophonist Jeff Clayton, to contemporary expressions he heard growing up as a child of the '80s and early '90s. In Clayton's unique vision, those diverse inspirations are impossible to unravel, melding together into a sound that resonates with modern styles as boldly as it evokes classic and timeless sounds.

"The process is really natural," Clayton says. "When I'm in the experience of creating something, I try to open my ears and to be as selfless and open as possible. I grew up listening to and loving hip-hop, R&B, soul and rock. To me, they all flow from a single source. The cultural relevance of jazz and hip-hop is all the same; we're talking about black music -- about black expression -- so it doesn't feel right to build any dams across those streams.

An alternate definition of tributary, he adds, is that of "a person or state that pays tribute to another" -- another apt metaphor in the tradition-oriented world of jazz. "Much of what we do has to do with what's gone before us," he says. "We're constantly paying tribute to the elders, the masters, and being cognizant of all of the musicians who've lived and died in service of the music."

To record ***Tributary Tales***, Clayton assembled a group of artists both new and familiar, each of whom brings additional, unique influences and experiences to the music. Saxophonists **Logan Richardson**, **Ben Wendel** and **Dayna Stephens**, bassist **Joe Sanders**, drummer **Justin Brown** and percussionists **Henry Cole** and **Gabriel Lugo** join guest vocalist **Sachal Vasandani** and poets **Carl Hancock Rux** and **Aja Monet** to bring life to Clayton's range of alluring compositions.

"I've really enjoyed exploring the natural connection between instrumental music and spoken word. I find there to be great potential for one to give unexpected meaning to the other."

Gathering this cast of individual artists together to create a unified musical voice is another way Clayton sees the reflection of the tributary concept in his creative life. Pulling back to take an even broader view, he sees a beautiful parallel for communion and togetherness at a time that's been marred by divisiveness and strife.

"Even though we're all separate streams, we all come from the same ocean," he says. "If we all just take a step back we can see that all human experience is essentially the same -- the suffering, the will to transcend that

suffering, our joys, our sorrows -- they're all connected. I'd love for the music on this record to remind people of our interconnectedness."

The hectic, angular edge of "Unforeseen," then, might suggest the frantic pace of Clayton's adopted home of New York -- especially as experienced by a west coast kid more acclimated to riding waves than subway cars. "Soul Stomp," as its names suggests, is a celebratory, raucous bounce, a glimpse of ecstatic happiness with the funky punch of R&B and the sanctified tinge of gospel. "A Light" burns with modern hip-hop sensibility and simmering groove, while "Patience Patients" draws in the listener with its slowly uncoiling melodic line.

The acclaimed Vasandani weaves his wordless vocals around the melodic lines of Richardson and Wendel on "Squinted," while Monet and Hancock Rux both reflect on the elusive idea of love on "Lovers Reverie" and explore the path from the deeply personal to the transcendent on "Dimensions: Interwoven." The album is punctuated by a series of brief, improvised interludes, the open-ended titles of which ("Search For," "Reach For," etc.) turn the track list itself into a poetic rumination.

While different songs may spark certain memories or recall images to his mind, Clayton says it's not as simple as a single experience inspiring a single piece of music. Just like our personalities are subtly shaped by the gradual accumulations of circumstance and events, so is his compositional voice invisibly molded by the places he's been, the people he's met -- even the meals he's eaten.

"I can point to those moments in life when the experience feels otherworldly, almost like a taste of transcendence. A bowl of pasta in Italy, falling in love, making a connection with a new friend from another part of the world, surfing -- the feeling of tapping into the energy of the ocean and dancing with it -- those are all really special moments and, in their own way, artistic beauty. As is making music, connecting with the musicians I play with. All those experiences connect to one another and feel similarly spiritual."

The tributaries of Clayton's fascination with language and his multi-faceted gifts as a musician merge gracefully in his poetic liner notes for *Tributary Tales*.

Gerald Clayton · Tributary Tales
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For more information on Gerald Clayton, please visit: GeraldClayton.com

For media information, please contact:

DL Media · 610-667-0501

Maureen McFadden · maureen@dlmediamusic.com

Matthew Jurasek · matthew@dlmediamusic.com

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